

SB 278: AN ACT CONCERNING NURSING HOME FACILITY MINIMUM STAFFING LEVELS

The role of a Nursing Home Social Worker is very complex and multifaceted. The information and material that is required and needed to do the job is tremendous and enormous. These willing professionals go into work every day not knowing what they will encounter and have to handle throughout their time in the facility. They do this, with graciousness, compassion, kindness, thoughtfulness and a caring attitude for their residents, all while being understaffed and overworked. Why do they do this? They care about the lives and livelihood of the people they serve. The residents, families, staff and communities deserve better. The nursing home population is worthy of more and should receive the beneficial and valuable expertise of nursing home social workers.

Resident's care and social work services in nursing homes should be supported. The social worker to resident ratio is antiquated and needs to be corrected by providing the resident's with more social work staffing levels. The current social work to resident staffing levels allow approximately 9 minutes per week to address current needs and concerns. Nine minutes per week is all we think that a nursing home resident is worth? That is what we think of human beings that require twenty-four hour skilled care? I think not!

Social workers are so invaluable and indispensable with their abilities and proficiencies and no other department can or should handle the psychosocial needs of nursing home residents. Social workers utilize their skills to work with residents, families, staff and the community. They have knowledge of various resources, interventions, approaches, communications, techniques and methods. They use theory as a basis for how they make their decisions and how best to appropriately assist a resident. If they're only given nine minutes per week per resident, they cannot possibly be giving each resident the care and services they deserve. If a resident requires more than 9 minutes of care, then another resident loses out. Is that the message that we want to send to a human being in need of support? Absolutely not!

We do not want to send the message to resident's and their families that we do not have time to help them. We do not want them to think that we do not care about them. That is not right, fair or just. We are their voice! We want them to live the best life they are able and be successful in aging.

Social workers are an integral part of nursing home life and existence. Social workers are responsible for and have to handle so many things in facility life. The needs of people have become greater and more challenging over the years. As a nursing home social worker for more than a decade, the job requires more than it used to. Residents have more complex diagnoses, they're living longer, they have more chronic diseases, they have financial needs, mental health and medical health matters, there's more paperwork to complete, there are more family and friend dynamics than in the past. All of this takes time and residents ought to have the time they need to work through their issues and have their needs met.

Social workers education and knowledge is varied and they are always trying to learn more so that they can help the residents to have the best quality of life. Social workers are aware of people's basic human rights and advocate for them. They want to enhance their lives and keep them engaged and active and make sure they feel safe being who they are. Social workers have training in cultural competency, diversity and awareness and they are in tune with the needs of our most vulnerable populations.

It is time for resident's to be treated with the highest respect and dignity by giving nursing home social work the recognition it deserves and change the social worker to resident ratio to 80 beds to 1 full-time social worker.

Thank you,

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